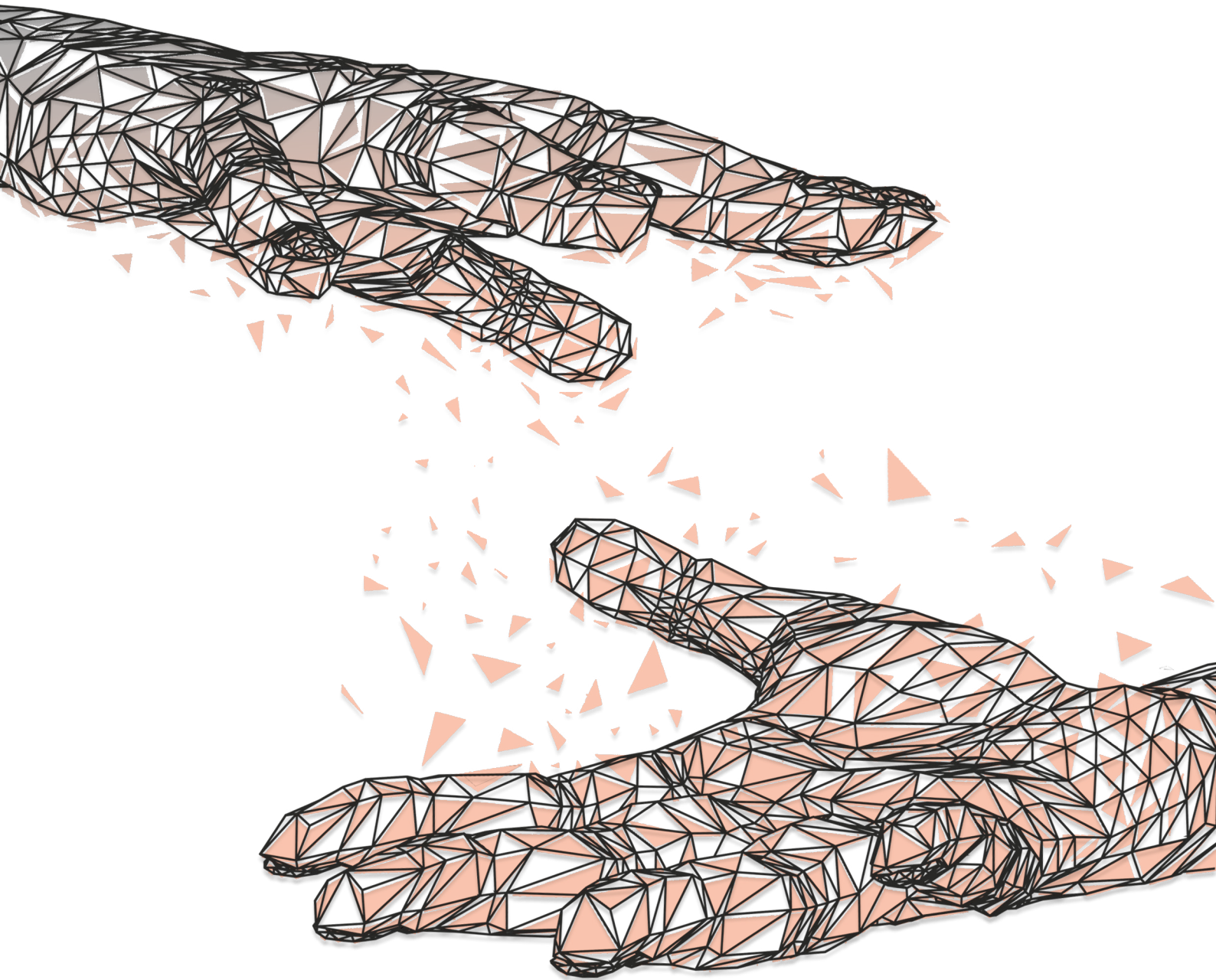


**COUNSELLING PRACTITIONER  
BEGINNER TO ADVANCED**



**LIFE POSITIONS  
THEORY**

Thomas Anthony Harris was a psychiatrist and pioneering self-help author. In 1967 he published a book, "I'm OK - You're OK" which went on to sell over 15 million copies. Harris' practical guide sprang out of his admiration for the work of his friend, Dr. Eric Berne, in the development of Transactional Analysis (TA). He was also grounded in the groundbreaking research of brain surgeon, Wilder Penfield.

Penfield had conducted research on patients by stimulating the memory areas of the brain whilst on the operating table, and discovering that patients could be stimulated into 'reliving' past events in vivid detail. He concluded the brain records memories like tape recorder, even though they may not always be accessible to conscious recall[1].

Berne's work on TA, was a departure from the psychoanalysis of Freud, and instead emphasised the transactions and 'games' that occur between them in the interactions. Therefore rather than attempting to change the internal state of the patients, Berne was instead attempting to treat the methods by which they interact with others, which are representative of unconscious states[2].

**Important to Harris' framework is the TA model of PARENT-ADULT-CHILD (PAC):**

- **Parent:** this is a state where people tend to unconsciously mimic the way in which parents behaved, or similar authority figures (or at least their interpretation of that behaviour). So if a father used to display short temper and anger at mistakes, the person concerned may also show that kind of behaviour.
- **Adult:** this state begins to develop as the child starts to gain control of its life and environment. It is a more objective state that evaluates potential outcomes affected by emotional states and begins to predict results.
- **Child:** in this state people reproduce behaviour, thoughts and feelings similar to those of their childhood. Perceived slights can have quick sulky responses, there is little to filter instant emotional reactions. It is also a playful, creative and spontaneous state.

**"Through the Adult the little person can begin to tell the difference between life as it was taught and demonstrated to him (Parent), life as he felt it or wished it or fantasied it (Child), and life as he figures it out by himself (Adult)."**

Thomas A. Harris, I'm OK - You're OK

**Harris drew on these to create his framework, known as the four life positions[3]:**

1. I'm Not OK, You're OK - placing yourself in an inferior position. This is often as a result of expressing the Child state during interactions, and viewing the other person as the 'Adult'.
2. I'm Not OK, You're Not OK - a deficit model in which you see yourself as weak and the person interacted with as weak. This will tend to be an unhealthy way to relate to people, and may often be as a result of projecting your child state onto another
3. I'm OK, You're Not OK - a position of superiority, liable to make others see you as arrogant, superior, authoritarian, mothering or dictatorial. It is a position that sees deficit in others, but self-awareness of one's own faults tends to be scarce.
4. I'm OK, You're OK - a healthier state of equilibrium on the whole, giving best opportunity for successful relationships



## How are you interacting with others?

Take time to consider some key relationships and how they work. If it is not immediately apparent, next time you interact with that person, observe the language you use and the language they use, as well as attitude and disposition. Can you spot recognise where you might place yourself in an inferior or superior position? Are you projecting your own weaknesses onto others?

### Your mother (or mother figure):

Observations (language, attitude, demeanour of you and them):

Life position:

### Your father (or father figure):

Observations:

Life position:

### Your sister/brother:

Observations:

Life position:





# LIFE POSITIONS THEORY

**Your boss:**

Observations:

Life position:

**Your neighbour:**

Observations:

Life position:

**Your work colleague:**

Observations:

Life position:

**Friend 1:**

Observations:

Life position:



# LIFE POSITIONS THEORY

**Friend 2:**

Observations:

Life position:

## References:

1. Penfield, Wilder (1952). *Memory Mechanisms*. *AMA Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 67(1952): 178–198. pp. 178–198. Retrieved from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/314627930/Memory-Mechanisms-Penfield>
2. Berne Calcaterra, Nicholas (1999) from [www.ericberne.com](http://www.ericberne.com)
3. Harris, Thomas (1969). *I'm OK, You're OK*. Harper.

